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A SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN.

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Preached in the

QUEEN'S

BRITISH MUSEUM

Serm. 13

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Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

AT

St. JAMES's.

January 9, 170$\frac{3}{4}$.

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By *R. Duke*, Prebendary of *Gloceſter*, and Rector of *Blaby* in *Leiceſterſhire*.

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PSALM XXV. 14.

The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will ſhew them his Covenant.

THE Secret of the Lord, which, by way of Explication, is here alſo call'd his Covenant, is, by the generality of Expoſitors, interpreted that Counſel of God from all Eternity of ſending his Son into the World for the Redemption of loſt Mankind. The ſame which the Apoſtle ſtiles *the Myſtery that was kept ſecret ſince* Rom. 16. 25.

Eph. 3. 9. *the World began*; and in another Place, *That Myſtery which from the beginning of the World has been hid in God, who created all things by Jeſus Chriſt.* And of this important Secret God was pleas'd, from the very Infancy of the World, to make gradual Diſcoveries and Manifeſtations, and in all Ages of his Church to *ſhew this his Covenant to thoſe that fear'd him.* To *Adam* firſt in Paradiſe, out of infinite Tenderneſs and Compaſſion, immediately after his Fall; then to *Abraham*, the Father of the Faithful, after that to *Jacob*, to *Moſes*, to *David*, to *Iſaiah*, *Daniel*, and other his peculiar Favourites and Saints. This being the Subſtance, and the main Import of all that *God ſpake by the Mouth of his Holy Prophets ſince*
1 Pet. 1. 10, 11. *the World began, who Prophecy'd of this Grace that ſhould come, by the Spirit of Chriſt that was in them.*

From the Words thus underſtood I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. That the Goſpel of Chriſt is a Myſtery, imply'd in the Text by its being call'd the *Secret of the Lord*, not attainable without ſupernatural Revelation, nor to be found out but by thoſe to whom he himſelf will ſhew it.

II. The

II. The Qualifications requiſite in thoſe that are to receive this great Myſtery. *The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and to them he will ſhew his Covenant.*

I. The Goſpel of Chriſt is a great Myſtery; and that in both the Senſes of the Word.

Firſt, As it ſignifies a Truth hidden from all former Ages, and which had never been known to Mankind, had it not been reveal'd by the Spirit of God.

Secondly, As it ſignifies a Truth ſo ſublime and Heavenly, that even after the cleareſt Revelations that we in this imperfect State are capable of, it muſt ſtill remain, in many things dark, and infinitely beyond our Comprehenſion.

Firſt, It is a Myſtery, in that it was undiſcoverable by the moſt exalted Powers of Human Underſtanding, 'till God out of infinite Mercy was pleas'd himſelf to reveal it. *Eye has not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither have enter'd into the Heart of Man the things which God has prepared for them that love him: But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit,* ſays the Apoſtle. And our Saviour himſelf to the Father, *Thou haſt hid theſe Things from the Wiſe and Prudent, and haſt re-* 1 Cor. 2. 9, 10. Matt. 11. 25.

vealed them to Babes. Theſe Things which even
1 Pet. 1. 12. *the Angels deſire to look into:* Thoſe Heavenly Spirits themſelves, in the ſimpleſt Purity of their Nature, and the brighteſt Clarity of their Underſtanding, in their moſt exalted Station, and Attendance ſo near upon God himſelf, are yet beholden to the Revelation made to the Church, for what they know of the myſterious Contrivance of our Redemption; as is plain from that
Epheſ. 3. 9, 10. of St. *Paul, To make all Men ſee what is the Fellowſhip of the Myſtery, which from the Beginning of the World hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jeſus Chriſt: To the intent that now unto the Principalities and Powers in Heavenly Places might be known, by the Church, the manifold Wiſdom of God.* So infinitely was it above the Underſtanding, and beyond the Imagination, not only of *Adam* himſelf, or the wiſeſt of the Sons of *Adam*, but even of the ſublimeſt Spirits in Heaven, how God's infinite Mercy ſhould be reconcil'd to his inflexible Juſtice in the reſtoring of Fallen Man, ſo as to ſatisfie at once the ſtrict Demands of the one and the kind Importunities of the other; 'till God himſelf, out of the hidden Treaſures of his Wiſdom, that πολυποίκιλος σοφία, that

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ſo eminently exerted it ſelf in the adorable Myſtery of our Redemption, found out an Expedient, how both the Sin ſhould be puniſh'd and the Sinner pardon'd; his Juſtice fully ſatisfy'd, his Majeſty undiminiſh'd, his Holineſs unſtain'd, his Truth preſerv'd entire and inviolate, by a Perſon of infinite Dignity interpoſing himſelf in the Offendors Room, anſwering the higheſt Demands of offended Omnipotence, and doing not only Right but Honour to every one of God's Eſſential Attributes and Divine Perfections. Who can here help crying out with the Apoſtle, *O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wiſdom and Knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his Judgments and his Ways paſt finding out!* But, Rom. 11. 33.

Secondly, Even after the cleareſt Revelation that our preſent State is capable of, there muſt be own'd to be in the Chriſtian Religion Myſteries far ſurpaſſing the Higheſt Pitch of Human Underſtanding.

Indeed it may be juſt Matter of Complaint and Wonder too, that at this Day we ſhould be put to the Proof of this, which St. *Paul* ſo long ago thought out of the reach of all Diſpute. To *him without Controverſie, great was the Myſtery of Godlineſs,* 1 Tim. 3. 16.

lineſs, God manifeſted in the Fleſh! But we have liv'd to an Age wherein Men, and Chriſtians too as they call themſelves, have taken upon 'em to be wiſer than that great Apoſtle; who, tho' *He had been caught up into the Third Heavens, and heard unſpeakable Words in Paradiſe,* yet confeſſes that in this Life *we know but in part, we ſpeak and underſtand as Children, and ſee through a Glaſs, darkly.* But alas! this is too mean and poor a degree of Knowledge for our Modern, more refin'd and exalted Chriſtian Philoſophers. To them there muſt be nothing in Chriſtianity myſterious. Partial Knowledge, and ſeeing thro' a Glaſs darkly, is below theſe enlarg'd and enlighten'd Underſtandings, that deal in nothing but full and adæquate Conceptions, and clear and diſtinct Ideas. The Apoſtles and Primitive Chriſtians might indeed be content with this, they might ſpeak and underſtand as Children, for they were Servants of Faith; but theſe, it ſeems, are Maſters of Reaſon, and muſt be allow'd to ſpeak and underſtand as Men. Men, not of the ordinary or vulgar Size, ſimple, and credulous, and weak, and eaſie to be impos'd upon; but of a daring, free, Philoſophical Genius, that love to ſearch

2 Cor. 12. 2, 4.

1 Cor. 13. 9, 11, 12.

ſearch to the bottom of things, that will have Demonſtration for what they aſſent to, and ſcorn to take any thing upon Truſt: No, tho' deliver'd by Chriſt himſelf, and his Apoſtles, if it has the leaſt ſeeming Repugnancy, or Shadow of Contradiction to the Infallible Judge within 'em, which they are pleas'd to Complement with the Name of right Reaſon; and therefore reject, with Indignation and Scorn, whatever comes addreſs'd to them in the Name of Divine Myſtery, as an Affront put upon their Wit and Underſtanding.

But becauſe this ſort of Men have made ſuch a Noiſe in the World with their loud Boaſts of Reaſon, advanc'd by them above the Scriptures, and made the ſole Judge of all the Doctrines contain'd in them; let it be permitted to us to examine a little their Pretenſions to it, and we ſhall find that they neither ſpeak of Faith as becomes Chriſtians, nor of Reaſon as becomes Men. For Reaſon it ſelf, ſound and ſober Reaſon, rejects this proffer'd Sovereignty, will not accept of that Divine Worſhip which theſe Men would pay unto it, due only to the Word of God; but like the Angel, at whoſe Feet St. *John* fell

fell down to worſhip, forbids all thoſe that are
Rev. 22. 9. too forward to adore it in the ſame Words, *See thou do it not.* Falſe Reaſon indeed, like Satan transform'd into an Angel of Light, would gladly be worſhip'd, and has found but too many Votaries, in this laſt Age of Atheiſm and Socinianiſm, makes Oſtentation of great Treaſures of Wiſdom and Knowledge, and ſays, *All this will*
Matt. 4. 9, *I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me*; and is therefore deſervedly to be rebuk'd in our
10. Lord's Words to the Tempter, *Get thee hence, Satan!*

Muſt we then utterly lay aſide the uſe of Reaſon in Divine Matters? Is there no Employment in Religion for Natural Light? Yes, certainly, very much; nor is it to be imagin'd that God, when he gave us the Light of his Holy Word, did deſign by that greater and ſublimer Light to put out that of Reaſon, which he before had given us. Since this Revelation is vouchſaf'd to no Part of the whole Creation, but that which is endu'd with Reaſon; ſince none but rational Beings only are capable of the great Redemption that it propoſes, not the Angels themſelves that are above our manner of Underſtanding, much leſs the Beaſts, that are below it; ſince,

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in this Senſe, Reaſon may be ſaid to put Man alone into a Poſſibility of being ſav'd, it were very abſurd that It ſhould be excluded in the great Work of Salvation.

We will therefore ſet down diſtinctly how far we are glad to allow the uſe of Reaſon in Divine Matters.

Firſt, Then Reaſon is of great uſe in aſſerting the Principles of Natural Religion, ſuch as are the Being of a God, the Obligation to Worſhip him, the Immortality of the Soul, and the Eternal and Eſſential Difference between Good and Evil, partly diſcoverable by Natural Light. Yet even theſe, as *Aquinas* well obſerves, when conſider'd as reveal'd by the Holy Ghoſt in the Word of God, are receiv'd and embrac'd more ſurely and ſafely by Faith, our Reaſon adding its Suffrage, and ſubſcribing miniſterially to the Dictates of Scripture, not magiſterially impoſing its own.

Secondly, We own that Reaſon is highly uſeful to reveal'd Religion alſo, ſince it is from Rational Inducements that we firſt admit even Revelation it ſelf. 'Tis by Reaſon we diſtinguiſh what is truly Divine from Enthuſiaſm and Impoſture; by It we are enabled to diſcover what is

that Manifeſtation of the Mind of God, to which, when thus diſcover'd, our beſt Underſtanding juſtly reſigns it ſelf up, and readily ſubmits. And when it does ſo, tho' of the myſterious Doctrines reveal'd, we may not be able to give any Reaſon; yet, for our Belief of 'em, we give the beſt in the World; which is this, Becauſe they are plainly taught in the Word of God, who can neither be deceiv'd, nor deceive; for to give Credit to ſuch a Witneſs, is one of the firſt and moſt evident Dictates of Reaſon. So that if there is not always a Reaſon of *what* we believe, yet there always *is* a Reaſon *why* we believe; and *this*, which we are ſure we have, is ſufficient to oblige us without *the other*, which we are ſure, from the Nature of Things themſelves, we never can have. But further,

Thirdly, Reaſon is of excellent uſe not only in finding out and aſſerting the Divine Authority, but alſo in expounding and interpreting the Mind and Meaning of Holy Writ, as long as it is ſober and modeſt, and keeps ſtrictly to the Analogy of Faith. For he muſt be void of all Reaſon, who, in ſearching the Senſe of Scripture, will deny that Reaſon is to be us'd as an Inſtrument, as the ſame

Key

Key by which we alſo open and diſcover the Meaning of Human Writers; by attending to the Scope and Deſign of the Author, by comparing the ſeveral Parts of the Diſcourſe, by obſerving the Dependance of one Clauſe upon another, and giving Light to obſcurer Places from thoſe that are more plain and clear. But he who will allow no ſenſe of Scripture, unleſs it be conformable to the Judgment or Prejudice of his own Reaſon, tho' in plain Words expreſs'd *in it*, or by direct Conſequence drawn *out of it*, does at once moſt ſhamefully abuſe both God and Man, Scripture and Reaſon.

Fourthly and *Laſtly*, Reaſon is moſt uſefully and ſucceſsfully employ'd in ſtopping the Mouths of Gainſayers, in enlightening their Blindneſs, or ſubduing their Contumacy, in confuting Hereticks by turning their own Weapons upon themſelves, and vindicating Divine Truth from all thoſe Calumnies which are unjuſtly brought againſt it. Thoſe Doctrines particularly, for the ſake of which the pretended great Maſters of Reaſon labour to fix the Imputation of Abſurdity and Contradiction upon our moſt Holy Faith, by ſhewing, as it has moſt abundantly been ſhew'd,

that all thoſe Contradictions and Abſurdities, of which they accuſe the Catholick Belief, are in no wiſe in the Doctrines themſelves, but are wholly owing to their groſs Ignorance that object 'em. An Ignorance altogether unpardonable, ſince join'd with ſo much Confidence as to make Men affirm poſitively and boldly, that there are manifeſt Contradictions in thoſe things, the Nature of which, at the ſame time, they are forc'd to confeſs they are utterly ignorant of.

It is by the true uſe of Reaſon we diſcover whither the falſe Truſt, which theſe Men put in it, muſt naturally and unavoidably carry 'em. Will not this Principle, That nothing is to be believ'd, but what is clearly and diſtinctly perceiv'd by the Underſtanding, lead 'em to caſt off not only all Reveal'd, but all Natural Religion too? and make 'em deny One God, as well as Three Perſons? *For can they by ſearching find out God? Can they find out the Almighty to Perfection?* Can they conceive or explain his Eternity? Can they comprehend how his infinite Duration is coextended with all the different Succeſſions of Time? How with him that which is paſt is not gone, and that which is future is not to come?

Job 11. 7.

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Can they frame any Idea of his Omnipreſence? Or form any Notion of a Being that without Extenſion or Parts fills both Heaven and Earth, and is every where preſent, and no where contain'd? No; the ſame Holy *Job* tells us both of his Immenſity and Eternity, *Behold, God is Great and we know him not, neither can the Number of his Years be ſearched out.* Job 36.26.

Again, Will not this Principle bring 'em to deny even their own Being? For either they conſiſt of two Parts, not only of different but contrary Natures, the one Corporeal the other Spiritual, or they do not. If they ſay they do not, and that there is nothing in 'em that is immaterial, can they conceive how lumpiſh Matter and ſenſeleſs Atoms ſhould work themſelves up to Senſe and Thought, to Reflection and Diſcourſe, to Reaſon and Wit, enough to argue againſt God, and droll upon Religion? But if they own that a Spiritual Soul alſo is neceſſary to the producing of theſe Operations which they are conſcious of in themſelves, can they explain how theſe two Natures were brought together? Or ſhew us the inviſible Tie of that ſtrict Union between Matter and Incorporeal Mind? Things that have no Similitude

militude or Alliance to each other? Will they make out how they mutually act the one upon the other? And how the entire Communication between 'em is perform'd? This, I dare say, bold as they are, they will not undertake. But if they cannot, by their own Principle they ought as well to deny that the Reasonable Soul and Flesh is one Man, as that God and Man is one Christ.

But further, Will not this same Principle directly lead them to deny the most obvious Things in Nature? We being utterly ignorant of the real Essence of the most ordinary Beings that every Day come in our way. Not an Insect, or Plant, or Stone, not the smallest or vilest Particle of Matter, but has in it wherewithal to puzzle and confound the most clear and enlarg'd Understanding. And of Body in general, how familiar and well acquainted soever Men may think themselves with it, we may safely affirm, that if we go to examin nicely and Philosophically into the Nature of it, we shall find our selves as much at a Loss as in the Nature of Spirit. The infinite Divisibility of Matter, whether granted or deny'd, drawing after it Consequences of as great if not greater Difficulty than any that can follow from the Notion

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of an Immaterial, Thinking Subſtance. Shall we therefore deny that there is any ſuch thing as Body, 'till we can clear up all the Difficulties contain'd in the Notion of it; and part with our Senſes, in complement to our Underſtanding? This a *Socinian* muſt do, if he will be true to his Principle; but if he will not, is not he a very abſurd, unreaſonable and ſenſleſs Infidel, to reject and deny the Chriſtian Myſteries, only becauſe he cannot underſtand their Natures, when there is nothing beſide, that he believes and ſees in the whole World, the Nature of which he does underſtand? *Thine own things, and ſuch as are grown up with thee, canſt thou not know? How ſhall thy Veſſel then be able to comprehend the Way of the Higheſt?* ſays the Angel to *Eſdras*. And the Wiſe Man, *Hardly do we gueſs aright at Things that are upon the Earth, and with Labour do find the Things that are before us, but the Things that are in Heaven who has ſearched out?*

Eſdras 4. 10, 11.

Wiſd. 9. 16.

In fine, 'Tis by the right Uſe of Reaſon that we convince theſe falſe Pretenders to it, that that Accountable and Reaſonable Doctrine of theirs, as they call it, which has in this latter Age been reviv'd and ſet up, in Oppoſition to the true Chriſtian

ſtian Faith, is a Complication of the moſt groſs both Moral and Intellectual Abſurdities, that ever were heap'd together: In that it ridicules the Scripture, by putting mean and trifling Senſes on it, far unworthy the Wiſdom by which it was inſpir'd; in that it makes the whole *Jewiſh* Oeconomy no better than a Childiſh Piece of Pageantry, by deſtroying the true Significancy of all its Types; and turns the whole Chriſtian Religion too into a very mean and contemptible Inſtitution, by taking away the Divinity of its Author; and, to make ſome ſpecious Amends for That, complementing Chriſt with a kind of Poetical and fictitious Apotheoſis, thus introducing downright and palpable Idolatry, in Deifying a Creature, and giving Divine Worſhip to One, who, according to them, by *Nature is not God*: The laſt degree of Stupidity that even the Heathen World could be guilty of, and the higheſt Affront to the moſt clear Dictates of Natural Light.

And by this time I think I have ſatisfy'd theſe Men, that in ſome Caſes, even concerning Religion, we too are glad to make uſe of Reaſon; *Quam Doctrina Chriſtiana nunquam formidabat*, as St. *Au-*

St. *Auſtin* ſpeaks; of which neither the Primitive Church ever was, nor Ours now is, nor, we truſt, ever ſhall be afraid. But the Dominion and Maſtery of that may juſtly be feared, the Miniſtry and Service of which we gladly uſe, and thankfully enjoy. We ought to take Care therefore that it encroach no farther, nor exerciſe it ſelf in things that are too high for it, nor wander out beyond the Bounds of its Juriſdiction. But as in material things Reaſon juſtly corrects the Error of Senſe, ſo it ought it ſelf to be rectify'd and controll'd, in thoſe that are ſupernatural, by Faith. The Objects of which we are by no means to ſuffer, that they ſhould be finally judg'd by Reaſon, ſo as to be allow'd or rejected as they approve themſelves to its Diſcourſe and Principles. For tho' it be impoſſible that any Divine Revelation can contradict right Reaſon, as Truth cannot be inconſiſtent with Truth; yet it is not only poſſible, but certain, that God can reveal ſuch Truths as we have neither Faculties proportion'd to, nor Natural Powers to judge and determine of. And ſince the firſt Original in every thing is the Rule by which all Copies taken from it are to be try'd and examin'd, and ſo God's Eternal

Truth is the Rule of the Truth of Things, and the Truth of Things the Rule of the Truth of the Underſtanding; it follows that Divine Truth neither can or ought to be cited to the Bar of Human Reaſon, but on the contrary, that Human Reaſon is to be try'd by the Truth which is Originally and Primarily in God, and manifeſted and reveal'd from him to us. Wherefore we are not to argue prepoſterouſly thus; This ſeems contradictory to Reaſon, and therefore cannot be the Word of God; but naturally and concluſively thus, This is agreeable to the Word of God, and therefore cannot be againſt Reaſon. The Teſtimony of God is ſufficient Security to us, that we ſhall believe nothing that is unreaſonable; upon that therefore he expects we ſhould entirely rely, nor preſume with our ſhort Underſtanding to ſound the Depths of his unfathomable Wiſdom. Accordingly we may obſerve, that whatever Doctrines were deliver'd by *Moſes* and the Prophets of old, or by our Saviour and his Apoſtles ſince, they never remitted their Hearers to the Judgment of Reaſon, or us'd demonſtrative Arguments and ſcientificial Proofs for what they taught, but enforc'd it only by the Divine Authority, from whence it

was

was deriv'd. *Thus ſaith the Lord,* this is the Prophetical Stile. *Where is the Wiſe? where is the Scribe? where is the Diſputer of this World?* This the Apoſtolical. *Verily, verily I ſay unto you:* This the Solemn and Majeſtick Preface that uſher'd in the Doctrines which our Saviour Preach'd; and to convert a whole World to himſelf he ſent out, not learned Philoſophers to perſuade with Reaſon, but ſimple Fiſhermen to command Faith. 1 Cor. 1. 20.

In ſhort, in the ſublime Myſteries of our Religion, Reaſon has no more to do, when it is once ſatisfy'd and convinc'd of the Revelation, but to receive from It thoſe Truths, which by its own natural Powers it never had been able to have found out; to receive 'em, I ſay, with entire Submiſſion and full Aſſurance, with devout Joy and humble Thankfulneſs, not reckoning it ſelf injur'd or diſturb'd, but rather aſſiſted, and rais'd, and improv'd by new Diſcoveries of Truth flowing from the Father of Lights, the Eternal, Inexhauſtible Fountain of all Knowledge.

The Goſpel of Chriſt having been thus ſhewn to be the Secret of the Lord, it remains that we conſider,

II. The Qualifications requiſite in thoſe

that are to receive this great Myſtery. *The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.* And in this ſenſe that of *David*, which, after him, his Son
Prov. 9. 10. *Solomon* repeats, is moſt undoubtedly true, *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wiſdom*, of that Wiſdom which alone makes wiſe unto Salvation, and that both by a Natural Efficiency, and by a Divine Aſſiſtance.

Firſt, By a Natural Efficiency. Whoever loves the Precepts of God, and delights to do what he commands, will meet with little Difficulty in believing what he reveals. There is a natural and eaſie Paſſage from Loving to Believing; Truſt and Confidence is begotten more by Love and Affection, than by Reaſon and Diſcourſe. Nothing ſo quickens the Eye of the Mind to diſcern, nothing ſo enlarges the Heart to conceive the things of God, as the Fear and Love of God expreſs'd in the Obedience to his Laws. He that has this Principle within, opens willingly and readily his Soul to Chriſtianity; for it ſpeaks to his Heart, and every thing he meets with in the Goſpel fits the Temper of his Mind. On the other Hand, all the Objections that are fram'd againſt Religion are, in Truth, not ſo much the Exceptions of Mens Reaſons, as

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the Struggling of their Vices againſt it, and the Unwillingneſs to Obey makes the chiefeſt Difficulty to Believe. Would Religion ſuit it ſelf to Mens Inclinations, would it flatter their Pride or gratifie their Ambition, would it ſatisfie their Avarice or give way to their Malice or glut their Revenge, but chiefly, would it indulge their Senſuality and Voluptuouſneſs, give a Looſe to their Luſts, and lead 'em thro' all the falſe Delights and bewitching Pleaſures of this World, who would be more ready Votaries than they? What Articles of Faith wou'd not then be of eaſie Digeſtion? What Myſteries wou'd be too hard for their Belief in ſuch a Religion? But ſince the Goſpel of our Saviour is altogether of another Nature, ſince all its Commands are ſtrictly pure, and holy, and meek, and merciful, and juſt; ſince it enjoins Mortification and Self-denial, condemns Covetouſneſs as Idolatry, Hatred as Murder, and a luſtful Look as Adultery; in fine, ſince it is directly oppoſite to the ſordid ſenſual Delights of this World, and all that is ſo unreaſonably grateful to Fleſh and Blood, the Caſe is quite alter'd; Men wholly addicted and given up to theſe will never want Cavils and Objections againſt any Revelation whatſoever, be it never

never ſo clear, or reaſonable, or well atteſted, if it comes accompany'd with ſuch Precepts. It is plain that it is not want of ſufficient Proofs for their Conviction that makes Men deny the Truth of Religion; for it may be eaſily ſhewn, that there is ſcarce any thing in the World that is generally believ'd, but is believ'd upon leſs Grounds; but it is the Prejudices of a vicious Will and corrupt Affections that obſtruct Belief. For that the Will, tho' in Matters of Knowledge or Faith it has no direct proper Concurrence, yet has a very effectual Influence over our Belief, may be from hence concluded, that to Believe is a Command, that Faith is ſtrictly by God himſelf enjoin'd, and a bleſſed Reward promis'd to it, and Infidelity threaten'd with eternal Torments. Now Commands muſt be of Things ſome way in our Power, and Rewards and Puniſhments always preſuppoſing ſome voluntary good or evil Action, cannot be propos'd but to the Will. Without the Conſent of this, neither could Unbelief be a damnable Sin, nor any degree of Belief a Chriſtian, ſaving Faith, but ſuch a Faith as may be found even in Hell it ſelf. For the Devils themſelves, from the irreſiſtible Light and Efficacy of Divine Truth, are

forc'd

forc'd unwillingly to believe, to *believe and tremble*. Jam. 2. 19 Whereas true ſaving Faith requires a devout and humble Submiſſion of the Mind and Heart, a Complacency and Delight and Joy in the Truths that it receives. God has ſo order'd it, that both the Objects of our Faith, and the Manner of the revealing of them, ſhould be ſuch as might chiefly exerciſe the Liberty of our Will; in his infinite Wiſdom he has been pleas'd Thus to deal with the Children of Men; He has reveal'd his Truths not ſo clearly and demonſtratively, as to leave no room to the Rebelliouſly Wicked and Obſtinate to cavil at and reject them, and yet with Evidence enough to an honeſt and good Heart to own and embrace them. For this end it is that Religion has its venerable Myſteries as well as its plain Doctrines, leads us by a Cloud as well as by a Pillar of Fire. There is in it Obſcurity enough to humble, as well as Light enough to convince the hearty Believer. Likewiſe there is in it Obſcurity enough for the preſent falſe Excuſe, and Light enough alſo for the future juſt Condemnation of the perverſe Infidel. God having been pleas'd, in the Manifeſtation of himſelf, ſo to Veil himſelf too, in ſuch a manner to mingle Light with Darkneſs, that it

ſhould

ſhould moſt depend upon the good or evil Diſpoſitions of the Heart, to believe or reſt in Blindneſs. But,

Secondly, Beſides this Natural Tendency, there are thro' the whole Scripture many ſignal Examples, as well as poſitive Promiſes, of Faith and Heavenly Knowledge to a due and ſincere Practice of what we already know. With whom were in all Ages the Secrets of the Lord, to whom of old was ſhewn the hidden Will of the Almighty, but to ſuch as perform'd his revealed Will at a higher rate of Strictneſs and Sanctity than the reſt of Mankind. *I have more Underſtanding than all my Teachers, I underſtand more than the Ancients*, ſays Holy *David:* But whence proceeded all this Divine Learning? It immediately follows, *Becauſe I keep thy Precepts.* But our Bleſſed Saviour's Promiſe is of all the moſt expreſs and encouraging, *If any Man will do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine if it be of God.* It was an Anſwer full of Wiſdom and Piety, which a great Man of our own Nation gave, when being conſulted what Method of Study was likely to be moſt effectual towards the Underſtanding of the difficult and obſcure Paſſages in St. *Paul*'s Epiſtles, his Advice was this,

Pſal. 119. 99, 100.

John 7.17.

That

That the way likelieſt to ſucceed was to begin at the end of thoſe Epiſtles, to ſtudy diligently, and practiſe faithfully thoſe Rules, which are there with ſo much Plainneſs laid down, relating to Chriſtian Manners, a Holy Life, and Godly Converſation; and then, and not 'till then, to proceed to the former part, where the Doctrinal Points and Matters of Faith are more nicely, and ſubtilly, and exactly handled. Certainly a Mind exercis'd in the plain Precepts will, of all, moſt eaſily diſcover the more obſcure Truths of Religion, the Grace of God accompanying and rewarding Obedience with further Degrees of Faith; whereas, on the contrary, they, who neglect and deſpiſe the clear intelligible Commands, what ever Study or Application elſe they may uſe, are juſtly ſhut out as Unholy and Prophane from the more hidden, venerable and holy Myſteries of the Goſpel.

I ſhall make but Two ſhort Inferences from what has been ſaid, and conclude.

Firſt, then; Since Pride, and Self-conceit, and a too confident relying upon our own Reaſon, has been ſhewn to be ſo dangerous and deſtructive of our Holy Faith, let us ſtrive to attain a deep and a true Humility of Spirit, and a juſt Senſe of our

own Natural Blindneſs and Infirmity. Let us all labour to attain this bleſſed Temper, let us avoid all curious and nice Enquiries into Things that are too high for us, let us in Holy Things be very cautious how we indulge any Wantonneſs of Fancy, Singularity of Opinion, or Novelty of Doctrine. Let us not only guard our ſelves againſt the Wiſdom of the World that attacks us from
Col. 2. 8. without, and *beware leſt any Man ſpoil us thro' Philoſophy and vain Deceit*, as St. *Paul* adviſes: But alſo, and that moſt chiefly, keep diligent watch over our own Conceit of Wiſdom that be-
1 Cor. 3. 18. trays us within; *Let no Man deceive himſelf*, as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, *but if any Man among you ſeem to be Wiſe, let him become a Fool that he may be Wiſe*. Let us ever remember and acknowledge God's undoubted Right that he has over the whole Man, and that his Dominion extends it ſelf as well to our Underſtanding as our Will; and that therefore as we are ty'd to obey the Commandments of God, tho' with Repugnancy to our Will, we muſt own our ſelves under an equal Obligation to believe the Word of God, tho' with Reluctancy to our Underſtanding. Accordingly to receive and embrace, as undoubted Truth, what ever

God

God has been pleas'd to reveal, how much ſo ever it really is above Reaſon in its uncorrupted State, how contrary ſoever it ſeems to be to it as now corrupted. *Let us caſt down all Imaginations and every high thing that exalts it ſelf againſt the Knowledge of God, and bring in Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Chriſt.* Let us, with all Submiſſion of Mind, be thankful to God for the Uſe of that Light of his which he has ſet up within us, our Reaſon, but withal learn to uſe it modeſtly and ſoberly; let it know its own Extent, how far it can reach; its own Capacity, how much it can contain; its own Weakneſs, where it muſt yield; its Duty, where it is to obey. Let it be inſtructed that it is to miniſter to, and not to exerciſe Dominion over Faith; that it ought humbly to acknowledge that it is Favour enough for it in Divine Matters to be often admitted as a Witneſs, and not repine that it muſt never be ſubmitted to as a Judge. 2 Cor. 10. 5.

Secondly and *Laſtly*, Since we have learnt that the Secret of the Lord is communicated to them only that fear him, and that to be true Believers we muſt be actual Doers of Chriſt's Word, let us heartily, and induſtriouſly, and zealouſly ſet upon this

this Work, the fulfilling the whole Will of our Lord. Let us live ſo that it may be our greateſt Intereſt, our heartieſt Wiſh, our earneſteſt Deſire, that all that we believe ſhould be true, that there ſhould be an Eternal Recompence for all that is done here in the Fleſh. Oh! that we would thus by a conſtant Exerciſe of Virtue, and doing of all things pleaſing to God, encline our Hearts not only to believe and to know that he *is*, but to deſire that he ſhould be; to make our chiefeſt Happineſs conſiſt in that, and all our Comfort to depend upon not doubting of it! There would ſoon then no Remains of Infidelity be left, we ſhould ſoon then to our unſpeakable Joy and Satisfaction feel, by a ſincere and ſtrict Obſervance of the Chriſtian Duties, that we ſhould no longer have any Doubts or Scruples of the Chriſtian Faith.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghoſt, be aſcrib'd, as is moſt due, all Praiſe, Might, Majeſty and Dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

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FINIS.